2: Krige and Krige E-5 (1928-1939)1943
FX14 Lovedu FX14

object. In modern conditions it is not easy to cope with such a situation. On the one hand, many men work in the towns and some boys attend mission schools, and on the other the mobilization of the necessary organization and incentives is difficult in the face of discouragement and opposition. Many people realize that for practical purposes the payment of tax marks the introduction to manhood. The Christian mission cannot countenance interference with its schools. Adjustments are necessary, and in some tribes they are being successfully made; for instance, among the Koni of Matala, we saw an experiment whereby the whole *vudiga* was crowded into the month's holiday of the school in June–July, the purpose being to avoid conflicts with the Church and the educational authorities.

We cannot in this brief and generalized account do more than refer cursorily to a few aspects of the institution. It involves circumcision, but has nothing to do with biological puberty. Side by side with toddlers still drinking at their mother's breast, such as Khiebe in the 1919 initiation, married men of thirty or forty go to be circumcised. They will all one day belong to the same regiment. Moreover, there used to be an attenuated puberty rite, *hu fura khirugulu* (chewing the herb *khirugulu*), which is also chewed by doctors in order to give them power and insight to interpret the bones. The puberty rite took place after the first nocturnal emission; the boy went down to the river to wash; he was made to dig up a root, chew it and rub it between his legs in order to prevent the danger of *makhuma* (illness associated with crises in life); and he advanced from being a *musinaba* (child) to being a *mutanga* (adolescent or young man).

The *vudiga* is quite different: it is a circumcision rite which invests the adolescent with the beginnings of social adulthood. But the investiture is imperfect, for manhood is not attained at a single bound; one grows into it by imperceptible stages. There is no single criterion of adulthood and the maturity that is required cannot be given merely by a ritual act. For that reason also, the *vudiga* teaches, not any single virtue, but impresses upon the boy all the values of the society and the necessity of a new outlook. From the almost outlaw play-gang, he must be conducted to the fringes of responsible society or be placed in a position from which he can gradually make his way into society. It would be an exaggeration to say that the *vudiga* is designed to cope with the turbulence of youth; for even the circumcised are still wild.

The general pattern of the *vudiga* has often been described and is not difficult to understand. After some preliminary practice of songs, which are the life-blood of the institution, the would-be novices undergo a series of rites culminating in the circumcision at the river and are taken into a lodge hidden somewhere in the bush. This cuts them off completely from the outside world. In their seclusion, emphasized by all manner of taboos and restrictions which mark the difference of their lives from that of ordinary people, they learn strange songs and unintelligible formulae. The spirit of this period is difficult to recapture and the obscure symbolism and secret rites seem unrelated to any cultural realities; yet we must think of them as having their roots deep in the past, while they have become overgrown with the meanings and

2: Krige and Krige E-5 (1928-1939)1943
FX14 Lovedu FX14

881 purposes of the present culture. Then follows a stage, for about a month, of even stranger events, and it is heralded by a re-orientation of life within the lodge. At their singing performances the novices begin to sit facing the east, not the west, as in the previous three months. This re-orientation gradually affects more and more activities and issues in tentative contacts with the outside world. At last the lodge is burnt down and the initiates go home, where for a further week they remain on the fringes of ordinary life, to be drawn closer and closer by gradual ritual steps into the society and its everyday activities. But if these broad stages are intelligible enough, it is very different when we examine the details. They obviously have an immense background, both in a past that is lost in oblivion and in a present that owes many of its values to that past, but has at the same time added to and modified these values. Fortunately, however, as it is beyond the scope of this book to deal with those details, we may content ourselves with a few general observations.

The first stage among the Lovedu is *hu huva*, when the heads of districts are told to arrange that the novices be taken into the veld to learn songs. The teaching is quite informal; it is a preparatory class, so that the proceedings in the lodge two weeks later may go with a swing. The teaching is done, not by the real shepherds (*medabi*), but by their juniors, those who were very young in the previous lodge. They were the large-bellied toddlers (*dimbana*, literally 'little stomachs') who ran away from their mothers to enjoy the excitement of the lodge. It could hardly be expected that they would have absorbed much and so they learn now by teaching the novices. At this preliminary and informal training, the boys may attend if they like; there are no taboos and no restrictions; the teachers may not chastise their pupils. There is as yet no seclusion. Nor are the novices given any special work to do for the chief. The fence of the *khɔrɔ* at the capital has to be rebuilt, but the novices do no more than they, as youngsters living at the capital, would do on other occasions when the *khɔrɔ* has to be repaired. When they come home they, as well as other young boys, bring light branches used to fill in the interstices between the poles. From areas beyond the capital it is only the older men who, as is customary whenever the *khɔrɔ* is built, give their assistance. At last the new moon appears, and Copernicus heralds the approach of winter. The shepherds have their hair shaved, district heads come to 'take the firebrand', the symbol that authorizes them to hold the initiation, and the *vudiga* officially opens at the capital. It is a ritual occasion: the older men beat the younger, sometimes black porridge without relish is eaten in the cattle kraal, there is an alarm, and the boys are conducted to the river to be circumcised.

881 ● 304 For the circumcision the boys go to the valley which is appropriately called 'the place where things are forgotten'. They are being separated from ordinary life; they 'get lost'. The '*gɔma* first bites its owners', for in this as in other acts regard is had to certain precedences. It is the hierarchy of rank, as at a formal dinner among us, that is emphasized; but the precedence extends only, so to speak, to the three people sitting at the head table; the others take their place anywhere. As the operator proceeds, the old men chant, 'Sever, sever with the knife, [the foreskins]

2: Krige and Krige E-5 (1928-1939)1943
FX14 Lovedu FX14

let the fishes take' (*tshikhi-tshikhi ga mufaga, khɔɔc jia*). It is the shepherds who are chastised as they drive the novices, called cane-rats (*magwɔlele*) at this stage, to the circumcision; they run the gauntlet through the ranks of singing men. It is enough that the novices should suffer the painful operation. Some bleed profusely, but it is their own fault (so it is thought); the medicine they are given can only alleviate the penalty for pre-circumcision promiscuity. Much else is enacted, but we must pass on to the next stage, the three months of intensive training in the lodge. It is the period, *par excellence*, of seclusion. The novices learn songs and formulae; they make a dancing costume and practise dances; their eating is a hurried ritual, for, as they phrase it, 'We are going to the medicines, the medicines of the veld to which there is no end.' By this they mean they have to go out to hunt, but clearly it is more than hunting that is intended; the outside world is full of wonderful things, shrubs and trees and animals which require their urgent attention; and there is so much to be done and to be learnt, that they should not spend all their time filling their bellies.

If that is the meaning of the ritual at the sacred tables, great *digɔma* which shepherds, polluted by contact with women, approach at the peril of causing the novices to vomit, the ritual of the boys when they sit by the side of the fire 'stabbing the elephant' is inscrutably obscure. In other tribes the fire is undying and is called 'the elephant'. The Lovedu call the fire *khisibe* (meaning 'unknown', but probably from Kharanga *ximbe*, a coal of fire) not *ɖou* (elephant); they do not conceive it to be undying and they know nothing of the conception of 'stabbing the elephant'. Yet some of these conceptions are clearly present in the ritual: the ritual singing is *hu fɛfa ɖou*, merely one of the special phrases of the lodge; the song is *ɖo' vetsi*, an obvious contraction of *ɖou etsela* (elephant lie down); but not even the old men could suggest the derivation of the one from the other; the boys swing their arms in imitation of a stabbing action, but it is not thought of as such and, as they sing, the old men chant, 'Stab the elephant with arrows; next moon we return to those who have stayed at home.' Even this last is interpreted to mean that the boys by their action push on the moon to accelerate their return home. At a later stage, after the 'change', the *ɖo' vetsi* song becomes '*Mamaṭo u ile ɖou sala shagoni*' (mother-of-eyes said, 'elephant remain in the country'—because the boys are going home). We give this brief reconstruction to show how, despite obvious suggestions in this central ritual of the lodge, the Lovedu have reinterpreted the whole situation. This is one of the details to which we have referred, but with which we cannot here deal. The whole *vudiga* ritual is full of them and as often as not the original words of songs or formulae have become distorted out of recognition. Indeed, the diffusion of a culture element is far from being a simple matter.

The three months' seclusion is marked by taboos and restrictions and a régime which, for the Lovedu, is exceptionally strict. But, by comparison with other tribes, the taboos are not stringent and a great deal of latitude is allowed. The large-bellied toddlers are tenderly cared for by the old men. By day they play about in the lodge enclosure and by night

2: Krige and Krige E-5 (1928-1939)1943
FX14 Lovedu FX14

special permission from the queen on each occasion, and initiates circumcised and uncircumcised alike. 794

Gomana initiation to-day as held by Rasekwalo does not differ from the ceremonial in the queen's own *gomana* of old, though it is regarded as a 'business', a source of revenue to Rasekwalo, without the great power of the old Maulwi ceremony. Madume relates his experiences in 1929. He and about twenty others from the royal village, some of them over forty years of age because there had been no initiation for so long, set out for the scene of the initiation some twelve miles away in the charge of some men (*medabi* or shepherds) who had been through the *gomana* initiation. They walked at a very fast pace, almost running, because they 'were anxious to be initiated'. As members of the royal village, they did not, like the others, pay 5*s*. entrance fee, but on arrival in the evening were offered two huts to sleep in and given a meal. At sunrise next morning, when the *gomana* drums began to sound in the enclosure kept permanently for *gomana* purposes, the initiates gathered in the courtyard to be ceremonially beaten. This beating with sticks that have been medicated is said to *thusa* (help) the neophytes just as the *hu thusa* ceremony of a baby on the day it is first taken out of the hut strengthens it to withstand evil influences of the outside world. This beating is thus conceived to give health to the neophyte. The head of the school (Rasekwalo) himself stood at the gate holding two canes, a bent one in the left hand, a straight one in the right. As each boy passed with bent head and bare back, Rasekwalo, while pretending to beat with the left hand, really beat on the back with his right. The boys then put on the shirts they had had to doff for the beating and were conducted, filled with fearful anticipation, to the lodge by shepherds, who surrounded them and told them to look straight ahead.

On their arrival in the enclosure, they were made to kneel in two rows facing each other with bent heads for the operation. First some one blowing a spirit whistle brushed a handful of *muhulani* grass (*Rhynchelytrum repens*) over their heads, then two operators, one for each row, came with awl and knife. Four semicircular cuts are made on either cheek from mouth to cheekbone, the awl being used for lifting up the flesh. The process is very painful, but no importance is attached to manliness and the drumming and whistling drown all cries. Immediately after the operation, a piece of cloth (of any colour), bought by each boy for 6*d*. at the store, is put over the head, with loose ends hanging over the face and tucked in at the back under the shirt. This cloth must be worn when the initiates walk about, so that the cuts are not seen by the uninitiated, who are told that the boys are bitten by the *goma*. To Madume it came as a great surprise to find that the crying of the spirits was caused by whistles. After the operation the men whistled the song, 'Whoever reveals a *goma* brings about his own death or that of his father or mother', which was interpreted for the benefit of those who found it difficult to follow the whistling. They set out for home again almost immediately after the operation, for the formulae of the *gomana* are taught them at home. 794 304

The journey home was slow. The initiates, accompanied by five 794

2: Krige and Krige E-5 (1928-1939)1943
FX14 Lovedu FX14

881 of feathers to shade the head girl. After much dancing, cloths are tied round the initiates in the manner common to the possessed. This ceremony foreshadows the end of the initiation and indicates to the whole country that it is drawing to a close. The last month is devoted to
881 dancing: every area that is holding a *vyali* sends its initiates to dance
535 before the queen, some coming with *vuhwera*, others without. Last of
778 all come the people of Ravothata with the *magɔgɔbya* and it is their performance that closes the 'school'. The *magɔgɔbya* have more imposing
[293] costumes even than the *vuhwera*, characterized by the stuffed baboon and duiker that surmount them. After a number of important *digɔma* have been shown, there is a grand finale one night (*khilalawemi*), when the Bird hangs its head sideways and says, 'My head aches and I know my end has come.' A *gɔma* of the women, the Butterfly (*khiruruvɛlɛ*), dressed in leaves, comes dancing in at the girls' entrance to tease and chase the Bird. Before sunrise, when the Bird has returned to its hut, some of the initiates (those who have come for a short time only) may be taken to 'touch the Bird', a terrible ordeal. Then next morning they are all taken to the river, where they are shaved and given new clothes to wear. They are now 'things from the rubbish heap' (*zwigwamathukhu*), like boys after circumcision: they walk in a bent position, may not speak freely, receive gifts, and at night ask riddles (*dinyɛbo*) specially associated with initiations. The enclosures are burnt. After a final washing in the river the initiates return to ordinary life and activities. A small operation is performed on initiates at the river on the last day. Among some tribes
●[304] it consists of defloration, but among the Lovedu it is said to consist of a cut above the clitoris which is so small that it causes no pain or inconvenience.

881 At the time when the initiates make preparations for the arrival
292 of the Bird (February–March), the boys of those areas that have the
535 *vuhwera* as well are taken out into the bush every day to learn how to weave the elaborate costumes associated with this initiation. These are of two types: a light one, said to be for hunting, and a heavy one. Both costumes have skirts of loose-hanging grass, flung out in a circle by the gyrations of the dancer, as well as comely waist, arm, and leg bands and under-skirts of woven grass. The light costume has in addition broad shoulder bands crossing over chest and back and a mask resting upon the shoulders, veiling the face and open at the top. The heavy costume is far more imposing. Besides a woven waistcoat, there is an immense covering for head and shoulders, rising to a crested summit, flanked by what gives the impression of scales arranged in rows or projecting wings, and fronted by a snout like that of a crocodile. The dance reminds one, now of the prancings of a male bird courting its mate, now of a lizard convulsively shaking its whole body as it rests upon a rock. The lizard-bird suggests a weird dragon-like mythical monster, but its appearance belies its functions and qualities, though perhaps not the mystical meaning of the *digɔma* of the 'school'.

[778] The enclosure for *vuhwera* boys is made beside that for the Bird. Here, after having being beaten with medicated sticks, the boys spend their time, except when out hunting or dancing, their food being brought to

2: Krige and Krige E-5 (1928-1939)1943
FX14 Lovedu FX14

end of the horn being closed by a piece of beeswax, in which a small hole can be made when the mouth is applied for suction. Vein-cutting, however, requires greater skill, though even this operation is outside the province of the diviner. A vein on the back of the hand or on the instep is lifted with an awl and cut with a piece of iron or a razor blade. When enough blood has run out, cold water is applied and the cut held tightly with the fingers to stop the bleeding. This is a common treatment for illness believed to be due to unwanted blood in the body.

Scarification, except in the mutual inoculation and blood mixing of husband and wife prior to their first sexual intercourse after marriage and after the death or miscarriage of a child, is a treatment that is directed less at the evils of blood than towards a strengthening of the body or part of the body by the insertion of medicine. It is used in curing headache, for sprains and broken limbs, and for all 'strengthenings', such as that prior to taking a child out of the hut for the first time or the 'fixing' of one's body against witches. For general strengthenings, incisions are made on all the joints and on other parts of the body, such as head and neck depression, which are considered important. Scarification is, with the drinking of medicine or eating of powders, quite the most common form of medical treatment; it is used in the home as much as by diviners and forms part of many other treatments, such as the vapour bath. By far the most interesting form of scarification is, however, '*hu thœmela*' (vaccination) against smallpox in which matter from the pustules of affected persons, mixed with other medicines, is inoculated to introduce the disease in a mild form. It is done on the dorsal side of the wrist or on the forehead, a pattern which supports the claim that it was known prior to the advent of the European; moreover, the ingredients of the serum used by Europeans are not known. Possibly the treatment was borrowed from Arabs, who were the first to study smallpox and measles. The old method was still widely practised in the 1938 smallpox epidemic, for, though it was realized that it 'called' the disease instead of curing it, people noted that, despite European vaccination, there was still much illness.

Steaming and the vapour bath also form part of the practical elements in Lovedu medicine. There are various forms of steaming and smoking, all of which go by the same term. To 'loosen' a cough, chips of a certain root may be placed in a pipe with a live coal and smoked; to purify a person after a death, chips are charred on a potsherd and the smoke inhaled through a reed; before being taken out of the hut, a new-born child is held naked in the smoke of burning chips or root and bark; boils and other swellings are brought to a head by the application of the steam of boiling roots. To cure fever or general weakness of the body after an illness and for purification of husband and wife after the death of a child the procedure is more complicated. Red-hot stones are put into a large pot of medicated water and when it bubbles and boils the patient, naked except for a cloth passed between the legs, is covered with a blanket and steamed. After much spluttering and shouting, he is taken out, sprinkled or washed down with cold water and then either scarified on the joints or subjected to *hu hata*—that is, a river stone is pressed on the joints and is later taken back to the river. This treatment is considered too drastic

4: Krige and Krige E-5 (1928-1939)1954
FX14 Lovedu FX14

the initiates. It is something mystically powerful which transforms boys into men. But if the initiation as a whole is a *gɔma*, so also are the secret formulae, objects, and mummeries that form part of the ceremony.

With the *vyali-vuhwera* fertility cult, which is at the same time also an initiation for girls (*vyali*) and for boys (*vuhwera*), are associated many *digɔma*, in the form of masked figures in costumes made of grass, reeds, and leaves, or plays and mummeries emphasizing the value of certain foods. But the greatest of all is *Khiudogane*, Bird of Muhale (the royal founder ancestor), ruling spirit of the *vyali*, which is believed to emerge from a pool on moonlight nights, leave mists behind it when it departs, and upon which much of the ritual centres. It is the link between two aspects of sacred forces, that conceived as mysterious, fearful, approached only through elaborate symbolism, and that represented by ancestors and directly approached. For the bird is both a great *gɔma* and a symbol of the royal ancestors.

Revived in 1938, after an interval of twenty years, the *vyali-vuhwera* with its great *digɔma* is thought to promote abundance and rain, the welfare and happiness of the people. While it lasts it is the main national interest to which all energies are bent and all activities subordinated. Marriages are held up, the normal judicial machinery is at a standstill, and anything that might compete with the ceremonial is interdicted. Since initiates spend only early mornings and evenings at the secret enclosure, they sleep at home and are able to carry on essential domestic tasks for the greater part of the day.

The sacred drums of the tribe (*digɔma*), four in number, are kept and cared for by the people of Ravothata, a lineage that came from Phalaborwa, where the drum cult is more intimately connected with the chief than among the Lovedu. These drums, which are said to contain under the resonator a human skull and, in the case of the smallest, the facial skin of a councillor, are mystically linked with the life of the queen and the welfare of the tribe. The heir sits on the smallest drum while being taught the rain ritual and it must accompany the queen if ever she is forced to flee from her enemies. The sacred drums are spoken of as *vadimo* (gods) as well as *digɔma*, and they were beaten twice a year in the old days in a ceremony known as *gɔmana* as an appeal to the ancestors for rain and to thank them for the harvest. The latter took the form of an initiation into the secrets of the cult at which boys were given certain cuts on their faces.

Associated with the sacred drums and also classed as *digɔma* are the *zwidajani*, the weird whistling ancestor spirits of the royal lineage who come to earth in the guise, it is said, of half-men with one eye, one arm, and one leg, to take part in the rites connected with the sacred drums and in the annual harvest *thugula* ceremony in all royal and certain other lineages. They are, in fact, as is known to those initiated in the *gɔmana*, old men masquerading as spirits. They appear in the bush near the village and join in the singing of *lesugu* songs which are sung, on these occasions, through specially constructed secret whistles.

4: Krige and Krige E-5 (1928-1939)1954
FX14 Lovedu FX14

cause the latter to die by aggravating his illness. Similarly a man's mistress must avoid coming near the hut of his wife when she is ill or in childbirth, lest the mistress's sinister track endanger the life of the wife.

Makhuma (from *ku khuma*, to mix) is a concept which uses the analogy of contamination by mixture or contact to account for physical weakening, wasting away or enfeeblement (*ku figchela*). The situations that constitute the chief source of *makhuma* are critical transitions in the life of the individual as well as serious crises such as severe illnesses. The evil contaminates or infects the person who has undergone the change or who, in the case of death, comes into contact with its baneful influence. He seems to suffer from loss of vitality, or to become dislocated because of the change in his condition.

The measures taken to combat *makhuma* are in the first instance preventive. Strengthening medicines are administered or inoculated to fortify the individual by anticipation; thereafter, under isolating conditions that are gradually relaxed, an adjustment is made to the new situation. Thus novices in the various initiations are medically treated in anticipation of their susceptibility to *khuma* on entering their new condition. Babies are fortified (*ku thuswa*, to be helped) by scarification and steaming before they leave the hut of confinement; kin and other inmates of the village must after a death be readjusted by means of medicines and other treatment to the change caused by the death lest they *khuma*. *Makhuma* also affects possessed people who fail to use medicine with the first-fruits. A man will *khuma* if he cohabits with a woman after the death of her child unless she has first been medically purified, and she must also be careful not to give food to other children before treatment lest they get ill and die. If one baby dies, any illness its successor may have is liable to be diagnosed as due to *makhuma*. Even cattle may *khuma* after a death in the village or if a woman enters the cattle fold.

By logical extension and the invocation of a further series of presuppositions the concept is applied to the bones of a diviner, which are liable to *khuma* (lose their diagnostic powers) every month—they are said to 'see their moons'—or when used to divine about a death, and must be washed in medicine before being used again. Similarly the queen's rain-medicine will *khuma* unless given the first termites and first-fruits, or when people neglect observances connected with the burial of those who are 'hot'.

The evils differently conceptualized in the notions of 'heat', *makhuma* and 'shadow' have this in common: they are all instances of a ritual impurity, generated by certain states or conditions, not because of their morally reprehensible nature but because of their abnormality or their relation to reproductive processes or critical changes in life. 'Heat' and 'shadow' appear to be different aspects of the same kind of ritual impurity, but 'shadow' is dangerous only to someone whose resistance is low because of illness or immaturity, while 'heat' may have deleterious effects not only on healthy people but on natural phenomena, on ancestor spirits, and on